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SUBJECT: A RUSSIAN MARSHALL PLAN FOR AFGHANISTAN?

**¶1.** (SBU) Summary: A recent conference on Russian-Afghan relations organized by a Russian NGO provided Moscow an opportunity to demonstrate its concern over the situation in Afghanistan without committing to provide additional assistance to the country. The event brought together Russian officials and business representatives with visiting Afghans for events that focused on attracting Russian involvement in the Afghan economy, including rebuilding infrastructure. High-level GOR officials gave general comments that included a few oblique criticisms of the U.S. and NATO, while the conference organizer, a Russian nationalist and critic of the U.S., called for Russia to offer Afghanistan a Marshall Plan to stabilize the country as part of a larger strategy to develop Central Asia. We are skeptical that the conference will yield greater Russian private sector investment in Afghanistan, or presages a significant up-tick in assistance; however, the high-level GOR attendance at the event does underscore the fact that Afghanistan factors higher in MFA and Kremlin priorities. In Moscow's rendering, Russia remains an indispensable partner to the U.S. in stabilizing Afghanistan. End summary.

#### High-Level GOR Participation

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**¶2.** (U) The May 15-16 Russia-Afghanistan Forum, organized by the NGO the Institute of Demography, Migration and Regional Development (IDMRD), brought Afghan officials to Moscow for a series of events intended to enhance the Russian role in Afghanistan, with a focus on the economy. This included a meeting between Russian Federation Council members and Afghan parliamentarians, who called upon Russia to get more involved in the reconstruction of their country's Soviet-era infrastructure. The organizers had some GOR assistance in putting the event together, and sponsorship from a number of Russian companies, including Gazprom and Rostechnologiy.

**¶3.** (U) GOR Deputy Chairman Igor Sechin, Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev, and Director of the Federal Service for Drug Control (FSKN) Viktor Ivanov all spoke briefly at the May 14 opening of the conference, ensuring a high degree of attention by the Russian media to this non-official event. Sechin highlighted Russian food aid provided to Afghanistan through the Ministry of Emergency Situations, which was projected to include 25 tons of flour delivered in 2009. Patrushev welcomed Afghan participation in regional counter-narcotics efforts, and said the GOR favored establishing a regional counter-narcotics center in Afghanistan. Ivanov, a frequent critic of NATO for what he argues is a failure to stop Afghan narcotics trafficking, drew a correlation between the increasing number of foreign troops in Afghanistan and the increase in the country's drug production. Afghan Vice President Abdul Khalili, the senior Afghan official at the forum, claimed significant success by his government in combating narcotics, stating that 24 of 34 Afghan provinces were not involved in drug production.

¶ 14. (U) Discussion of potential Russian investment in Afghanistan, and involvement in rebuilding the country's infrastructure, were significant aspects of the forum, although there appeared to be little in the way of concrete results. A session attended by Afghan federal and regional government officials, and representatives of Afghan and Russian companies, spent much time highlighting the work done on Afghan infrastructure during the Soviet period. Conference organizer and IDMRD Chairman Yuri Krupnov claimed that this legacy presented Russia a unique opportunity to contribute to stabilizing Afghanistan, and called upon Russia to develop a Marshall Plan for Afghanistan. In the end, however, he admitted that the discussions had been "cautious," and Russian firms had not committed to working in Afghanistan.

An Odd Spokesman for Russia-Afghan Relations

¶ 15. (U) Throughout the conference, Krupnov returned to arguments he has made in a number of articles and interviews given during the past year, some of which were critical of U.S policies. A Russian nationalist with a checkered past, Krupnov has said that Russia must provide an alternative to the "bankrupt U.S. doctrine of exporting democracy" by "exporting development" to Afghanistan and Central Asia. This ties in to Krupnov's vision of Russia helping to establish a "New Middle East," a mega-region stretching from the Persian Gulf through South and Central Asia to Siberia. The linchpin to accomplishing this goal is the peaceful

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development of Afghanistan, which necessitates the GOR to develop a Marshall Plan for the country. According to Krupnov, what prevents Russia from accomplishing this is the U.S., which is pursuing the "disintegration and subordination" of Afghanistan.

¶ 16. (U) Krupnov presented a vision of Russia-Afghan relations thoroughly detached from reality, in which the Afghan people have no hostility toward Russia and look fondly upon the dams, roads, and other infrastructure built by the Soviets. In Krupnov's rendering, the U.S. and NATO have built only military bases since arriving in the country. He argued that the real reason NATO is in Afghanistan is to provide a rationale for the alliance's existence, and create a "strategic bridgehead" in Eurasia. In contrast, Soviet troops went to Afghanistan to provide security for the country's "economic, scientific, educational and humanitarian development."

¶ 17. (U) Krupnov is an agronomist by training who worked as a teacher and within the Soviet and Russian education bureaucracies before joining the staff of the Russian Duma in ¶ 2002. He attempted to found his own political party, the Development Party, in 2006, but it was denied registration by the GOR. Krupnov spent 2007 to 2008 working in the Khabarovsk city government before becoming Chairman of IDMRD, an organization that appears largely of his invention. He has written a number of books and articles related, some loosely, to Russian developmental and demographic issues. Krupnov is a self-promoter, who's image gazes thoughtfully from his personal website, [www.krupnov.ru](http://www.krupnov.ru).

Comment

¶ 18. (SBU) While Krupnov's comments during the conference were relatively tame compared to the criticism he has previously leveled at the U.S. and NATO, his extreme opinions appear to have some traction within official circles in Moscow, judging by the high-level GOR attendance at his conference. It is worth noting, however, that while we observed MFA officials involved in Afghan policy in the audience, none spoke or

appeared to have an official role in the event. We are skeptical that this forum will excite increased Russian investment, or presages a Marshall Plan for Kabul - economic realities do not bear this out. However, the senior GOR attendance at the event does reflect Afghanistan's rising importance to the MFA and Kremlin. Interest in expanding cooperation with the U.S. in defeating the Taliban, as evidenced during Medvedev's April 3 meeting with the President, coexists with policy pot-shots at NATO and U.S. failure to stabilize the region. In Moscow's mind at least, Russia remains the indispensable partner.

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